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ABSTRACT

This study compared and investigated the attitudes toward educating for international understanding in college students preparing to become elementary school teachers in Finland and the United States--particularly California. The study also explored whether participants thought their respective teacher education programs had prepared them to educate for international understanding. A questionnaire was distributed to a sample of students training to become elementary teachers in each of the two countries (51 in the United States and 93 in Finland). Both groups were predominantly female, and the Finnish students were somewhat younger than those from the United States. Analysis of the responses showed that both groups considered international education to be important. Americans tended to understand international education in more personal, local, and domestic terms with an interest in developing students' positive self image, and attaching importance to taking responsibility for self and others. The Finns thought of international education in more global terms and seemed to have a stronger group consciousness and a greater focus on national and cultural identity and understanding as it related to themselves and to others. Both groups indicated that they intended to teach so as to increase the international understanding of their students. However, both groups wanted more adequate preparation for teaching international education. (Contains 20 references.) (JB)

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Education for International Understanding: A comparison of attitudes and self-perceived skills of teacher education students in Finland and California

A paper presented at the annual conference of the
Comparative Education Society of Europe
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Introduction

We live in a world that is increasingly pluralistic and global in its orientation. The economic and political interaction between nations has become closer and more intimate on the one hand while on the other hand conflicts and strained relations have increased between nations, cultures and ethnic groups. These developments are reflected across Europe, in the United States and in the rest of the world. To live successfully in such a world requires that its citizens develop a new level cultural awareness and sensitivity including the ability to understand and to communicate with persons from other cultures and nations. Yet it is unclear how well schools are preparing students to live in this global community. Even more importantly, it is unclear how well teachers have been prepared to carry out these tasks.

One of the ways in which schools of both Finland and the United States (along with many other countries) have attempted to address this need has been with the introduction and development of school curriculum that has been referred to variously as International Education, Education for International Understanding, Global Education, Multicultural Education or Multicultural Studies. While each of these terms has come to take on somewhat different meanings (Alexandre, 1989-90; Kubus, 1989-90; Noronha, 1992) they do have a common core of concern with increasing understanding and communication between culturally and ethnically diverse peoples.

What we have here chosen to call "international education" encompasses to some extent the breadth of foci implied by all of the above terms, but with a special emphasis on cross-national and cross-ethnic understanding and communication. In both countries international education, in the broader sense, has become important as a way to promote positive attitudes between different races as well as encouraging understanding and solidarity between people of different cultures and nations. International education has also been understood as an important part of ethical education at school, where the aim is to educate students to be able to carry world-wide responsibility and love for one's neighbor.

According to the new Finnish curriculum (National Board of Education 1994) for example, the aim of international education is to raise students who know different cultures, strive for peace, respect human rights, and promote continuing development. Not only should they understand that nations are dependent on one another, and that equality and justice are foundational of human values, but they should also have a strong national identity and understand the importance of preserving one's own culture and cultural traditions. The United States has no comparable national program since each state is responsible for its own curriculum. However in many states, as in California, the goals for international education are similar to those expressed in the Finnish curriculum though, perhaps because

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of its sheer size, there may be some tendency to define the arena in more culturally specific and domestic terms (Alexandre, 1989-90; Bloom, 1987; Kobus, 1989-90).

Purpose of the Study

This study is a comparison of some of the attitudes, beliefs and educational experiences related to the development of international understanding of students who are preparing to become primary school teachers in Finland and in California (USA). More specifically, the study investigates the attitudes of these teachers-in-training toward the importance of the objectives or aims of educating for international understanding and of the extent to which they believe their respective teacher education programs have prepared them to carry out these tasks. Comparisons are made in each of these areas between students in Finland and in California

The student teachers are studied first, by asking their opinions about the importance of the aims of international education; second, by asking their perceptions of the adequacy of the international education component of their teacher training. It is assumed that future teachers will try to implement the aims they consider important. On the other hand, if the student teacher does not value the aims, he/she will not want to integrate the content of international education into his/her own education, neither would she/he, in the future work as a teacher, want to implement international education.

The ability to implement the aims of international education, in turn, depends also on the quantity and quality of the teacher education (training). The study thus investigated both the student teachers' indications of the importance they attached to international education and their perceptions of how adequate they believed their training in international education to have been.

Theoretical background

As mentioned earlier, the concept of international education is multifaceted. In this section we explore some of the different aspects of the term.

One of the questions in international education is its relationship to peace education. Depending on the different emphasis of their viewpoints, some scholars have described international education either as a sub-area of peace education or as a concept parallel to it, with overlapping content (Yli-Renko 1993). In this study, according to the UNESCO-recommendation (1974) and the official Finnish national curriculum (National Board of Education 1994), international education is regarded as global education comprising peace education, cultural education, development education, human rights education, environment education and equality education. In the USA on the other hand writers such as Alexandre (1986, 1989-90) and Lamy (1987) distinguish between terms such as multicultural education and global education on the basis of their focus on domestic pluralism and on international pluralism respectively and define global education broadly as "education for an interdependent world" (Alexandre 1989-90, p. 28).

The concept of peace education, from the Finnish perspective, means active non-violent conflict resolution with special sub-areas such as disarmament and security. Cultural education includes international understanding and cooperation, empathy and the ability to understand and appreciate the point of view and life-orientation of others. Further, it provides tools, cultural knowledge and awareness for communication across international and cultural divisions. In order to be able to communicate successfully on the international level one needs, besides knowledge of the language code, also knowledge of one's own

cultural environment as the basis for communication. There must also be a consciousness of the effect of one's own culture-related behavior on others. In addition, knowledge and understanding of foreign cultures are very important in international education . The basis for understanding of foreign cultures is the national identity and a healthy self-esteem. Studies in Finland indicate that Finns have rather low self-esteem, and they lack self-confidence and have a negative self-concept as communicators, even in the use of mother tongue (Sallinen-Kuparinen 1986) and particularly as speakers of foreign languages (Laine 1987, 1988, Yli-Renko 1988).

Human rights education includes the respect of human rights and values. It means taking responsibility for oneself, other people and environment. In implementing human rights education, it is important to prevent prejudice and to become critical of stereotypical thinking. Development education includes an awareness of world problems and a stance of active cooperation with developing countries. It aims to get the students acquainted with life in developing countries and with the relationship between the developing countries and industrialized countries. Environmental education includes acquaintance with environmental problems and environmental control (protection). Equality education aims to get the student to understand the meaning of equality between the sexes, age groups, social classes, different religious groups and different nations.

In a broad sense, then, international education is mainly education of values. The aim is to get the students to acquire these values and to adopt them in their own lives. International education focuses on developing the whole personality of the student. By the same token then, in order to be able to implement the aims of international education, the teacher of international education has her/himself to have a positive self-image and world-view. He or she has to have a deep respect for other cultures and to be ready to continuously acquire new knowledge. The teacher's attitudes and set of values are the most important base for implementing international education. This is a big challenge to the development of qualifications within teacher education. It is important that in teacher education the program develops the student teachers' awareness and values related to international education so that they can establish a basic international knowledge on which to build their actions and from which to teach. Teacher education should provide future teachers not only with adequate skills and knowledge to implement international education but also provide the kind of outlook on life that enables them to pass on to their students the ability to understand and value the cultural diversity that exists on planet Earth.

International Education in the USA and California

International Education in the United States has for some time occupied a significant, if not necessarily central, space in the cultural fabric of American higher education. The emergence in the seventie , of ethnic studies and the more recent, developing awareness of a multicultural agenda (Lamy, Alexandre, 1986, 1989-90; 1987; Noronha, 1992; Bunzel, 1992; Weaver, et. al., 1991) has contributed an additional overlay of domestic minority concerns to the international focus. There has not been, however, a national consensus on the content or aims of international education like that of Finland.

At the elementary and secondary school level in the United States the focus on culturally different populations has historically been relegated to the arena of geography or, somewhat more recently, social studies. Beginning with the "space race" of the fifties (precipitated by the successful Soviet launch of Sputnik) continuing on to the more recent "trade and technology wars" with Japan and Western Europe there has been the development of an increased awareness of the United States as a participant in a larger international arena and of the need to be able to compete in a global economy. The increasingly multicultural face of American elementary and secondary education, especially

in urban areas where there are large immigrant populations, and the inevitable tensions arising out of that milieu have further heightened awareness of both the international and multicultural dimensions of schooling.

There is nevertheless great variation among regions of the United States in the extent of such awareness and of its focus. Areas with large immigrant populations, for example, are forced by circumstances to pay attention to these issues whereas areas with small immigrant populations may not have developed the same level of awareness. These variations, coupled with the historical autonomy of states and local school districts to set curriculum makes it nearly impossible to generalize across regions, and even institutions, about international education in the United States (Buel, 1993).

Of the states, California is among those with very large numbers of immigrants in its elementary and secondary schools. In Fresno, for example it has been estimated that there are more than eighty different first languages in the children attending public schools there. Many schools have a larger number of "minority" children attending than "non-minority." The state of California has taken a variety of measures to deal with this phenomenon including the introduction of bilingual education and other programs to increase both the awareness level and the skills of teachers in dealing with ethnically diverse populations.

This study drew its California sample from the central valley of California in which the city of Fresno is the major urban area. This is a region of high ethnic and cultural diversity. In the public schools of Fresno city, for example, there are more than 88 different primary languages represented in the classrooms. Teacher education students in the Fresno area are thus especially aware of the multicultural dimension since it is a reality in the schools in which they have been trained and in which they are likely to teach.

International Education in Finland

Education has long been a high national priority in Finland. During the 1970s and early 80s the educational system underwent considerable change as the country moved from a parallel to a comprehensive system. The curriculum in the comprehensive and upper secondary schools are defined by law. Though Finland has historically found itself at the juncture of neighboring and differing cultures and ethnic groups, awareness of the needs for international education have increased over recent years because of an increasing influx of persons from other nationalities into the Finnish schools. This, along with the growing "euro-consciousness" of the entire European continent has contributed to bringing education for international understanding to the fore. Liemu (1985), for example, points out that universal human rights and a concern for international cooperation and exchange are among the major goals of Finnish education. The desire to provide for various cultural groups an active role in the ongoing enrichment and development of the larger Finnish culture

Methodology

A questionnaire was distributed to a sample of students who were training to become elementary teachers in each of the two countries included in the study. In addition a section requesting brief demographic information (section A), the questionnaire consisted of three additional parts, B-D. The first two of these, B and C, requested respondents to indicate their opinions about the importance of the aims of international education and about their perceptions of the adequacy of their training to teach for international understanding, respectively. The students were asked to respond on a five point scale in which a 5 indicated "extreme importance" or "fully adequate" while a one indicated "not at all important" or "there has been no training". Section D consisted of 5 open-ended questions.

Sample

The gender, age and prior experience characteristics of each of the respondent groups are indicated in Table One.

Table One
Gender, age and prior experience of respondents

	California	Finland
N	51	93
Percent Male/Female	14/86%	22/78%
Percent by Age Groups:		
20-29	78%	90%
30-39	14%	9%
40-49	8%	1%
Percent with Prior Teaching Experience:		
None	58%	29%
< 6 mo.	12%	28%
6 mo. < 1 yr.	21%	18%
1 yr. < 2 yr.	7%	15%
> 2 yr.	2%	10%

All of the respondents were near the end of their teacher training program. The California respondents had all completed their bachelors degree and at least one semester of the teacher education curriculum. Of those who with teaching experience, some had taught as a substitute teacher and others as an unqualified teacher, most likely in a private school which are not always required to meet the same criteria as public schools. Most were non-minority residents of California. A few (<10) were citizens of countries other than the United States or had spent significant time living abroad. The Finnish respondents had, on the whole, more teaching experience than did the Californians. Both respondent groups were predominantly female. The Finnish student teachers were, on the whole, somewhat younger than the Americans.

Analysis

In order to control for response set bias (the tendency for either group to generally respond to all questions higher or lower than the others) and to enhance comparability, the scores for sections B and C were standardized for each of the respondent groups on a mean of 3 with a standard deviation of 1 based on the mean and standard deviation of their own distribution across the combined scores of both sections B and C. The mean of the means and a mean standard deviation were also calculated for each of sections B and C for each respondent group.

Findings

The raw mean of the means and standard deviations and the mean of the means and the standard deviations of sections B and C are presented in Table Two.

Table Two
Raw means and mean standard deviations

	California Respondents	Finland Respondents
Mean, Section B	4.36	4.02
Mean Stan.Dev., Section B	.71	.79
Mean, Section C	3.66	2.79
Mean Stan.Dev., Section C	.85	.92
Overall Mean	4.04	3.46
Mean,Overall Standard Deviation	.41	.71

From Table Two it can be seen that there was some tendency on both sections B and C for the American respondents to respond at an overall higher level than the Finnish respondents. This was especially notable in section C where the mean Finnish response was below the midpoint of the scale (3.0). It is of course not possible to determine from the existing data whether this represents a "response set bias" or whether it is the result of actual differences in opinions or perceptions between the two groups. By the same token the American responses tended to be less variable than those of the Finns as indicated by the larger mean standard deviations for each section separately as well as overall.

The importance of the aims of international education.

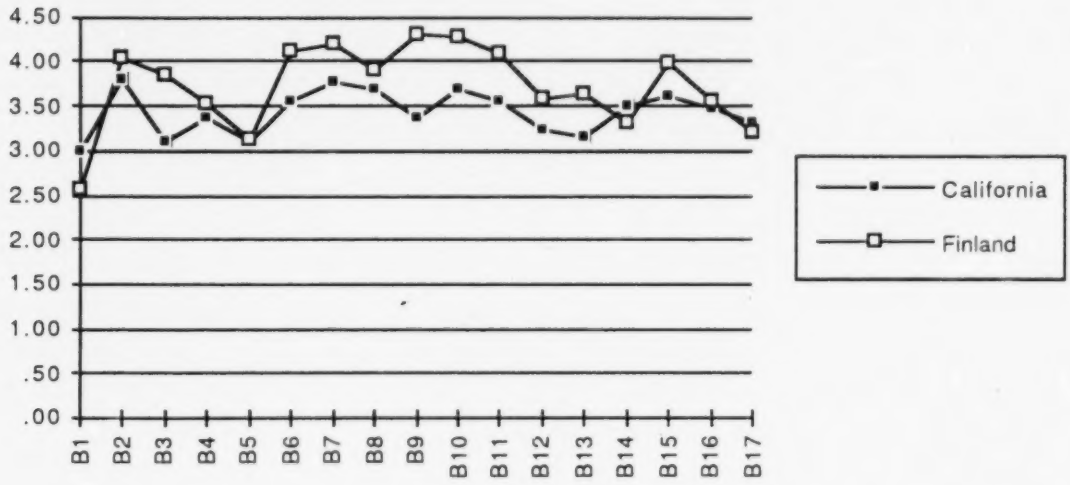
The standardized score responses from each of the countries on each of the statements about the importance of the aims of international education are presented in table and chart form as Table Three and Figure One, respectively.

Table Three
Perceived importance of the aims of international education

		California St Scores	Finland St Scores
B1	To obtain a better geographical concept of the world	3.00	2.56
B2	To obtain better knowledge of other people and cultures	3.79	4.04
B3	To obtain better knowledge about international cooperation	3.09	3.84
B4	To better understand how culture influences the behavior of people	3.38	3.54
B5	To become critical of stereotypical thinking	3.11	3.14
B6	To become more accepting of differences in people, cultures, etc.	3.55	4.11
B7	To better learn to take responsibility for self and others	3.77	4.20
B8	To better learn to act as a member of a group	3.68	3.91
B9	To develop a positive image of foreign cultures	3.36	4.31
B10	To develop a positive self-image and self-confidence	3.68	4.27
B11	To learn to better accept minority groups	3.57	4.10
B12	To develop empathy for people of other countries	3.25	3.57
B13	To develop a strong identity with their own culture	3.15	3.63

B14	To learn how and want to develop themselves intellectually and skillfully	3.51	3.33
B15	To learn how better to communicate with people	3.60	3.98
B16	To learn how to better separate opinion from fact	3.47	3.55
B17	To learn how better to express and argue their own opinions	3.32	3.22
	Mean standardized response	3.43	3.73

Figure One
Comparison of mean perceptions of the importance of aims



Based on the above data it is possible to make the following observations.

1. While there differences between the responses of the two groups, it is interesting to note some broad similarities in the pattern of responses between the respondents from Finland and from California. Both groups agree that obtaining a better geographical conception is of least importance (though the Finns feel most strongly about this). Both groups also attach relatively low importance to "becoming critical of stereotypical thinking.

2. Though the American respondents' raw scores were higher, when the scores are standardized across the distributions (as in both the table and the chart), it becomes clear that, on the whole, Finnish respondents tended to give higher ratings of importance to the aims of international education than did the Americans. Items on which there were particularly notable differences between the two groups (>.50 of the standardized score) included the following. In each case, the Finns considered these items notably more important than did the Americans.

- Obtaining knowledge about international cooperation, peace and human rights.
- Learning to accept differences in people, cultures, etc. as richness.
- Learning to take responsibility for self and others
- Developing a positive attitude toward other cultures and peoples
- Developing a positive self image and self confidence
- Learning to accept minority groups in ones own country.

3. The within-group pattern of responses suggest that for the American respondents, taking responsibility for ones self and others is most important while learning to act as a member of a group and developing a healthy self-image and self-confidence are next in importance. Obtaining a better geographical conception of the world was of least importance as an aim.

4. For the Finns, the most important item was that of developing a positive attitude toward other cultures, followed closely by developing a healthy self image and learning to take responsibility for self and others. They agreed with the Americans that obtaining a better geographical conception of the world was of least importance.

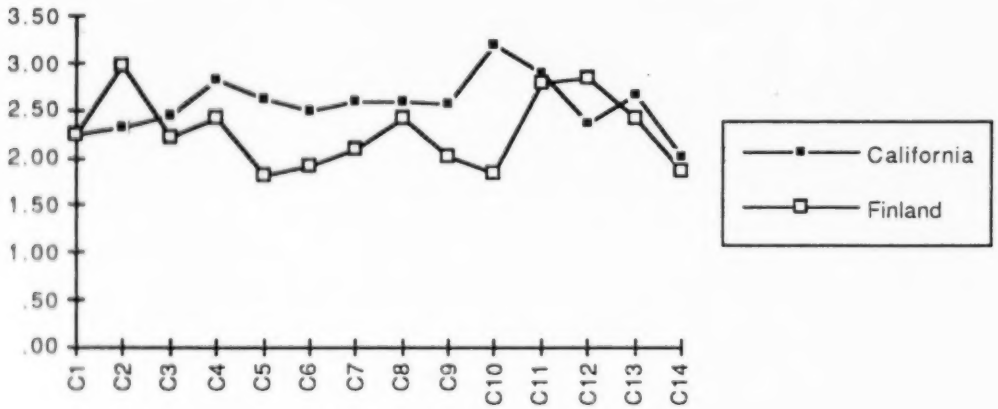
Section C of the questionnaire requested that respondents indicate their perceptions of the adequacy of their training as teachers for increasing the international understanding of their students. As noted, for purposes of comparison, these responses were also converted to standardized scores with a mean of 3 and standard deviation of 1. For both groups of respondents the overall means for adequacy of training were below those indicting the importance of the aims of international education. That is to say both groups of respondents generally considered the adequacy of their training to be below the level of importance they attached to the aims of international education. The standardized scores are indicated in Table Three.

Table Four
Perceived adequacy of training for teaching international education

		California Mean	Finland Mean
C1	Knowledge of other cultures and countries	2.25	2.24
C2	Knowledge and awareness of one's own culture	2.32	2.97
C3	Knowledge of and education about human rights	2.44	2.21
C4	Knowledge of and education for equality	2.81	2.43
C5	Knowledge of how to meet foreign students in class	2.63	1.83
C6	Developing concrete teaching methods	2.49	1.92
C7	Learning how to separate cultural prejudice from facts	2.59	2.10
C8	Learning how to integrate international education with other subjects	2.60	2.43
C9	Knowing how to chan[illegible]dent's stereotypical and prej[illegible]hinking	2.58	2.03
C10	Knowing how to dev[illegible]ents' positive self image	3.21	1.85

C1 1	Knowledge of how to teach development good human relations	2.90	2.79
C1 2	Knowledge of how to teach the cultural identity of own country/	2.36	2.86
C1 3	Knowledge of how to teach acceptance of dissimilarities	2.67	2.41
C1 4	Knowledge of how to teach international cooperation	2.01	1.85
	Mean standardized response	2.56	2.28

Figure Two
Comparison of perceived adequacy of training



Perceived adequacy of training

Again there were some similarities in the overall pattern of responses of both groups. Perhaps most remarkable, in contrast to section B, is the extent to which the profile of the California respondents for this section tended to be higher than that of the Finnish respondents. As mentioned previously, the mean responses of both groups of respondents suggest that they find the adequacy of their training in international education to be below the importance they assign to the aims of international education. But the effect was more pronounced for the Finnish respondents.

A closer examination of the profiles suggests the following.

1. California respondents felt that they had been most adequately prepared to "develop students' positive self image and self confidence, followed by "knowledge and education for equality", and "knowledge of how to teach good relations". They felt least confident in their knowledge of "other cultures and peoples", "knowledge of the cultural identify of their own country" and "knowledge of how to teach international cooperation."

2. While they tended to rank the adequacy of their education lower on the whole, the Finns considered "knowledge of their own culture, to be most adequate followed by "knowledge of the cultural identity of their own country" and "knowledge of how to teach development of good human relations." They gave the lowest

rankings to "knowledge of how to develop students' positive self concept and self image", "knowledge of how to meet foreign students in the classroom" and, in common with the Americans, "knowledge of how to teach international cooperation."

3. There are five questions in which there was a notable difference between the responses of the two groups (> .50 of the standardized score). These are listed below in order of magnitude without regard for direction. However, in all but one (noted below) the American rankings were higher (i.e., they found them to be more adequate) than the Finnish.

   - Knowledge of how to develop student's self image and self-confidence.
   - Knowledge of how to meet foreign students in class.
   - Knowledge and awareness of own culture (The Finns find this more adequate than Americans)
   - Developing methods to make international education concrete.
   - Knowledge of how to change students' stereotypical opinions and prejudices.

   Interestingly, the area of greatest difference (1.36 s.s.) was in the perceived "knowledge of how to develop student's self image and self-confidence". This was at the same time the American's greatest area of confidence and the Finn's least area of confidence.

In summary, and at some risk of over-generalizing, we are struck by two differences in the patterns of responses by the two groups two both sections of the questionnaire. First, the Americans responses tend, it seems to us, to personalize international education more than do the Finns. That is, their responses suggest a more personal interpretation of both the aims and of their skills in international education. This is reflected in responses such as their confidence in being able to "develop students' positive self image", in the importance they attach to "taking responsibility for self and others" and to "developing a positive self image". The Finns on the other hand, seem to suggest a stronger group consciousness and a somewhat greater focus on national and cultural identity and understanding, both as it relates to themselves and to others. This is reflected in the very high response they gave to "developing a positive image of foreign cultures" and in their confidence in teaching "knowledge and awareness of one's own culture". It may be that such findings can be explained by an understanding of the national histories of Finland and the United States. Not only is Finland demographically and geographically smaller and less diverse but has a well defined and longer standing cultural and national identity. The US. by comparison is much more diverse and much larger and as a "nation of immigrants" has an arguably less well defined cultural identity.

Though both groups rated the adequacy of their training, over all, below the importance they attached to the aims of international education, it would appear that the Americans are inclined to rank the importance of international education somewhat lower than the Finns while at the same time feeling somewhat more confident in the adequacy of their training.

Open ended responses

Section D contained three open ended questions which are indicated below. A summary of the responses to each question follows. Not all respondents completed the open-ended questions thus they cannot necessarily be interpreted as representative of the entire sample.

Question 1. What do you think is meant by International Education?

Both American and Finnish respondents offered similar responses.
•Most answered by saying that it was concerned with developing awareness, respect, acceptance and understanding of persons from other cultures including knowledge about values, manners, living conditions, religion, history etc.
•Several made reference to the fact that it also meant being aware of and accepting one's own culture.
•Some mentioned things like becoming aware of the inter-relatedness of today's world and encouraging cross-cultural experiences for students.

Question 2. Will you implement it in your classroom? What will you do? How will you do it?

American and Finnish responses were again similar in many respects.
• Most respondents indicated that they intended to implement international education into their teaching in some way. Several from both countries said that they would do so if there "was time."
• With regard to "how" they expect to implement, most said that they would use literature that focused on other cultures, hold discussions, develop writing activities that focused on cross-cultural issues and understanding and try to increase students exposure to other cultures.
• Many mentioned bringing parents of students from other cultures into the classroom and asking them to talk about their culture, family etc., as well as other special guests.
•A number of the Americans mentioned developing curriculum guides for multi-cultural education, celebrating differences within the classroom, encouraging students to talk about their own cultures and learning to value them, helping students become aware of their own biases and getting rid of stereotypes.
•Typical Finnish responses included theme weeks (project), special or theme days, group work, inviting foreign guests, correspondence, drama, role plays, etc. Several mentioned that good places to do international education are history, religion, geography, music, art, English language teaching (in Finnish elementary schools, the most foreign common language is English).

Question 3. How should Teacher Education be developed or changed to provide better for International Education?

• Fewer of the Americans responded to this question than most of the others. Of those who responded many said there needed to be more deliberate focus on developing understanding and acceptance of those from different countries and cultures. Several suggested that there should be specific courses or seminars on developing the teachers own knowledge and sensitivity to International Education as well as teaching them methodology and curriculum for incorporating it into their teaching.

• A typical Finnish response included: "Anything is better than now; instead of developing international education in teacher education, it would be better to start by giving it." Most Finnish student teachers suggested arranging an obligatory course of 1 or two study weeks (one study week in Finland is equal to 40 hours) in International Education. Almost all participants demanded concrete didactic materials and advice, not "fine scientific issues!" They requested the same attitude education for student teachers as they are supposed to give to the children at

school: the ability and means to resist racism. There were also requests for knowledge and skills to meet a refugee child in the classroom.

Summary

It seems clear from the responses of both groups of respondents that most of them consider international education to be important. For the Americans it would appear that international education tends to be understood in somewhat more personal, local and domestic terms than for the Finns who, it would appear, tend to think of it in more global, cross-national terms. Both groups indicate that they intend to teach so as to increase the international understanding of their students. Both groups seem to want more adequate preparation for teaching international education. It seems to us that there is hopefulness in the extent to which students in both countries have adopted the importance of the agenda for international education. It is also clear that teacher education faculty in both countries must continue to work at improving the international education skills which they offer their students.

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